



The Washington Flyer
February 7, 2025

"Education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom."
George Washington Carver

School Choice State Update: Tennessee Passes Universal Program, Texas Moves Closer to Goal

Tennessee became the 13th state to enact universal school choice with the passage of the [Education Freedom Act](#) last week. The new program will provide 20,000 scholarships of approximately \$7,300 to families so that their children can attend the school of their choice. The program will reserve half of the scholarships for families making less than 300% of the poverty level. The remaining 10,000 scholarships will be open to all families, regardless of income level. Upon passage of the bill, Gov. Bill Lee, a strong supporter of school choice, [posted](#) on X, "I've long believed we can have the best public schools & give parents a choice in their child's education, regardless of income or zip code. Today is a milestone in advancing education in TN." The bill also includes pay raises for public school teachers, funding for school construction and maintenance, and a guarantee that public schools will not lose funding next year if their enrollment drops because of the program. The bill passed during a [special legislative session](#), called by the governor to address school choice and other top-priority issues. "Education has the power to change the trajectory of a child's life, and every Tennessee child deserves to attend the school that fits their unique needs—regardless of income or zip code," [stated](#) Lee.

The Texas legislature is one step closer to passing school choice as they consider Senate Bill 2 (SB 2) during the opening of their legislative session. Late Wednesday evening, the state senate [approved the bill](#), sending it to the house for a vote. SB 2 will create a universal education savings account program that will provide \$10,000 scholarships to families for the educational method that best meets their children's needs. The program also includes an increased scholarship amount for students with disabilities and a decreased scholarship amount for homeschool families. Both Gov. Abbot and Lieutenant Gov. Dan Patrick [praised](#) the work of the state senate, with Patrick stating, "The Texas Senate's passage of SB 2 is the biggest launch of any universal school choice program in American history, with \$1 billion in funding for 100,000 students." At a hearing earlier in the week about the bill, AACCS Mid-South Regional Director Matt Ticzkus spoke in support of the bill, noting specifically the protections for autonomy and religious liberty for participating schools: "The autonomy and religious liberty language contained in the bill is exceptionally strong as it conveys to participating schools that they're free to carry out the mission of their school with no impact to curriculum, admissions, or hiring, and that a participating school is not a recipient of federal financial funds or a state actor."

National School Choice Week Highlights

Last week marked the [15th year of celebrating](#) National School Choice Week (NSCW), with over 27,000 activities and events highlighting the benefits of school choice for children and families. In addition to the rallies, school fairs, capitol celebrations, and flagship events, [27 governors](#) issued proclamations praising school choice, and the White House [hosted](#) a round table to discuss the continued expansion of school choice across the country.

The Nation's Report Card Releases Dismal Scores

The National Assessment of Educational Progress has released its 2024 report card, and the results are far from ideal. Every two years, NAEP releases math and reading results of students in fourth and eighth grades. Many educators hoped the 2024 results would show a comeback from the 2022 results influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the results showed little if any learning gain. The average fourth-grade [math](#) score in 2024 was 2 points higher than in 2022 but 3 points lower than in 2019. Eighth graders scored 8 points lower on the 2024 math test than they did in 2019. Overall, only 40% of fourth graders are performing math at least proficiently. Students who took the [reading](#) test also fared poorly. The test revealed that 40% of fourth graders cannot read at a basic level. The average fourth-grade reading score in 2024 was 2 points lower than in 2022 and 5 points lower than in 2019. Average eighth-grade reading scores dropped by the same amounts. While some top students increased their scores, many low-performing students continued to struggle. “The news is not good,” [said](#) Peggy Carr, commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics. “Student achievement has not returned to pre-pandemic levels, reading scores continue to decline, and our lowest performing students are reading at historically low levels.” In response, the Education Department [promised](#) that the Trump administration will “do better for our students. . . . Change must happen, and it must happen now.”

Trump Issues Pro-Life Executive Orders

On the day of the March for Life, President Trump took several [executive actions](#) to protect life. In one [executive order](#), Trump directed the Office of Management and Budget to issue guidance to departments and agencies on how to end taxpayer funding of abortion. The executive order also rescinded two Biden administration orders that violated the Hyde Amendment by encouraging departments and agencies to promote and fund abortion. In addition, Trump reinstated the Mexico City Policy that prohibits taxpayer funding for abortions in other countries. At the March for Life, Trump addressed the crowd through a prerecorded video. Vice President JD Vance addressed the crowd in person and said Trump would be “the most pro-family, most pro-life American president of our lifetimes.” The day before the March, Trump pardoned 23 pro-life activists convicted of violating the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act (FACE Act). “Until further notice, no new abortion-related FACE Act actions—criminal or civil—will be permitted without authorization from the Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division,” [wrote](#) Chad Mizelle, chief of staff to the attorney general. Pro-life supporters applauded Trump’s actions but called on the president to do more. “I don’t feel like we should have to beg the administration to do things which are in line with their stated goal of cutting back on federal engagement,” [said](#) Kristi Hamrick, vice president of media and policy for Students for Life of America. “We’re really looking for new things, bigger things.”

Last Week for Nominations for Christian School Teacher of the Year—Due February 14

The Herzog Foundation is accepting applications through Friday, February 14, for its [Christian Teacher of the Year](#) award. Nominees must be current K-12 teachers in a Christian school and demonstrate excellence, be highly respected, and align with the Herzog Foundation [mission](#). Learn more and nominate a teacher [here](#).

In Case You Missed It:

[Weekly Market Update](#) provided by Jeff Beach of the [AACCS Investment Team at Merrill Lynch](#)

[Practical Legal Help for Christian Schools: ADF Ministry Alliance](#)

[“The War on Women’s Sports is Over”: Trump Bans Males in Female Athletics](#)

[Trump Signs Executive Order Banning Government Support for Irreversible Child Sex Changes](#)

Jamison Coppola: Government Relations Director

Olivia Summers: Government Relations Assistant

Maureen Van Den Berg: Policy Analyst

Washington Office, 119 C Street SE, Washington, DC 20003